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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000309

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: A VISIT TO FOUR SOUTHERN STATES: PART 2 -
BAYELSA

REF: LAGOS 102

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL ROBYN HINS0JN-JONES FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) A

ND (D).

[1](#)1. (U) Summary. Once almost guaranteed re-election to the governorship of oil producing Bayelsa State, the incumbent, DSP Alamieyesiegha, is facing serious charges of corruption that have the possibility of disqualifying him. In the four years of his administration, the governor has had some very visible successes in improving the infrastructure and economy of Bayelsa. Despite his accomplishments, the fact of continuing legal challenges to his candidacy reflects dissatisfaction with the corruption that permeates Nigerian politics. End summary.

Background

[1](#)2. (C) For at least the past fifty years, repeated attempts have been made to divide Nigeria up into a manageable and rational pattern of States that would satisfy the demands for autonomy of its hundreds of distinct ethnic groups. Parts of both Delta and Rivers States were combined in 1996 to form Bayelsa State and meet the desires of the Ijaw ethnic group. Bayelsa thus became the thirty-sixth and newest Nigerian State. The Governor of Bayelsa is Chief Diepreye Solomon Peter Alamieyesiegha (known to his supporters as "DSP" or the "Governor-General of the Ijaws".) He is a member of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and until the PDP gubernatorial primary in early January, DSP appeared to be a shoo-in for re-election. Minister of Public Works and close confidant of President Olusegun Obasanjo, Tony Anenih, had endorsed the re-election of all incumbent PDP governors and vowed the Party's support. DSP was rumored to have a campaign war chest of billions of naira; so much financing that he reportedly purchased thirty-five speed boats to campaign in the region where it is usually easier to travel by boat than by road. In late January, however, a stumbling block arose in the form of a citizen's complaint against DSP to the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC). The complaint charged him with fraud and improper use of government funds. Eight other PDP governors (four of whom, including DSP, are from the south) are also under investigation by the ICPC. With elections scheduled for March and April, the road to the Government House at Creek Haven does not look as easy for DSP as it once did.

Getting to Bayelsa

[1](#)3. (U) Shortly before the ICPC investigations started, PolOffs went to pay a courtesy/orientation visit to Governor Alamieyesiegha. After flying from Lagos to Port Harcourt in Rivers State, the short trip by road to Yenagoa, the capital of Bayelsa, underscored the endemic problem of no maintenance of federal roads in most of Nigeria. Bayelsa is a littoral oil state and, with its share of oil income, should be fairly prosperous and well-maintained, but gaping holes in the road made for slow going in our short drive to the capital. The situation changed remarkably, however, at the Rivers/Bayelsa border. A four-lane, newly-paved highway led north into the State through what appeared to be overgrown, uncultivated land. About two miles from the Bayelsa State Offices, a "commercial strip" started that ran all the way to our destination at the State Offices. The strip was only one small store or stall deep, and we then understood how Bayelsa State earned the sobriquet of the "State with only one city and one road."

Big man in Bayelsa

14. (C) We were ushered in to the spacious and elegantly appointed offices of DSP, to join a group of people waiting to see the governor. After a wait of slightly over an hour during which DSP apparently dealt with state vendors and contractors ahead of us in line, we got to talk with the governor. (Comment. DSP actually is a big man--over six feet tall and very heavyset. He and the PDP members of his cabinet and administration are always photographed in black, wide-brimmed fedoras, giving them the appearance of early twentieth century Mafioso. End comment.) DSP was expansive and happy to spend time telling PolOfs of the accomplishments of his administration. He said that when he came into office, there was no State Office building or governor's Mansion, and he slept on the floor of the dilapidated former office building. Power generation in the State had been so bad or lacking, he said, that until recently the State could provide power only every third day. He bragged about the new road and a recent improvement in the provision of electric power to the capital. He told us that his dream of building the School of Arts and Sciences at Niger Delta University had come true when the school opened early this year.

15. (C) Asked about his campaign for governor, he was proud to tell us about the thirty-five boats he had bought and invited us to take a boat tour with him of the State on our next trip. DSP was not so ebullient when asked about challengers he faced and possible political violence that might flare up during the campaigns. At the time, DSP faced at least ten opponents, even some from his own party and administration. He frowned and answered that none of those contenders would last to the primary (he was correct), and if any one caused politically related violence he would "get them, even if (he) had to track them to their bedrooms!" The meeting ended on a positive note with the governor reminding us that Bayelsa was only six years old and had already made great progress under his administration.

16. (C) Comment. DSP is a former military officer, as are many at all levels of the Obasanjo government. Military style of unitary control, with everyone having to come to him for decisions, was evident during our meeting. He has no real opposition, and if the ICPC investigation does not disqualify him, he will probably be re-elected. However, the ICPC complaint was brought by noted human rights activist, attorney and presidential candidate, Gani Fawahinmi. The presence of Fawahinmi, a dogged pursuer of alleged miscreants, makes the matter unlikely to just disappear. Despite public statements of support from the PDP and the Obasanjo administration, DSP has had to take focus off his campaign and respond to the multiplying charges. The facts that DSP has faced one challenge after another to his candidacy, and that one of the nine (Chinwoke Mbadinuju from Anambra State) has already been disqualified, reflect the public's growing demand for transparency and accountability in government.

HINSON-JONES